

REFORMATION 500 WEEK 3: THE NEED FOR REFORMATION

The Protestant Reformation was a reformation of the Western Roman Catholic Church, not the Eastern Orthodox Church (the Western and Eastern Churches have been divided since the year 1054).

The Reformers were all born, baptized, confirmed, and educated in the Roman Catholic Church, and most of them had served as priests at her altars with the solemn vow of obedience to the pope on their conscience (Schaff, *History*, 7:13).

“At the beginning of the sixteenth century everyone that mattered in the Western Church was crying out for reformation” (Chadwick, *The Reformation*, 11).

The Roman Catholic Church desperately needed reform. Tradition had replaced Scripture as the church’s supreme authority; and the church’s leadership was corrupt. “The papacy was secularized [more interested in Renaissance than religion], and changed into a selfish tyranny [seen especially in the crusades] whose yoke became more and more unbearable. The scandal of the papal schism had indeed been removed, but papal morals...became worse than ever during the years 1492-1521.” The writings of contemporary scholars “are full of complaints and exposures of the ignorance, vulgarity and immorality of priest and monks. **Simony** [the practice of buying and selling ecclesiastical positions] and nepotism were shamefully practiced. Celibacy was a foul fountain of un-chastity and uncleanness [the popes had their own prostitutes and some flaunted their illegitimate children] Whole monastic establishments and orders had become nurseries of ignorance and superstition, idleness and dissipation.... Education was confined to priests and nobles. The mass of the laity could neither read nor write, and had no access to the word of God except the Scripture lessons from the pulpit [which taught that salvation is communicated through the priesthood]. The priest’s chief duty was to perform, by his magic words, the miracle of **transubstantiation** [the Latin phrase *Hoc est meum corpus*, “This is my body,” was used as a magic formula and shortened to “Hocus Pocus”], and to offer the sacrifice of **the mass** for the living and the dead in a foreign tongue (Latin).... Saint-worship and image worship, superstitious rites and ceremonies obstructed the direct worship of God in spirit and in truth. Piety which should proceed from a living union of the soul with Christ and a consecration of character, was turned outward and reduced to a round of mechanical performances such as the recital of Paternosters and Ave-Marias, fastings, almsgiving, confession to a priest, and pilgrimage to a holy shrine [part of doing *penance*]. Good works were measured by the quantity rather than the quality, and polluted by the principle of meritorious-ness which appealed to the selfish motive of reward. Remission of sin could be bought with money; a shameful traffic in **indulgences** (the selling of forgiveness to remove the temporal penalties of sin especially those suffered in purgatory) was carried on under the Pope’s sanction for filthy lucre as well as for the building of St. Peter’s Dome” (Schaff, 8-10).

The most famous peddler of indulgences, Tetzl, unashamedly claimed, “As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs.”

Enter Martin Luther. “Erasmus says that when Luther published his Theses [against indulgences] all the world applauded him” (Schaff, 7:98).

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REFORMATION 500 WEEK 3: HEIDELBERG CATECHISM, QUESTIONS 6-8

Question 6: Did God create man thus wicked and perverse? **No, but God created man good and after His own image, that is, in righteousness and true holiness, that he might rightly know God his Creator, heartily love Him, and live with Him in eternal blessedness, to praise and glorify Him.**

Question 5 told us that mankind has a natural tendency to hate God and neighbor. Question 6 tells us that God did not create man in this sinful condition. Rather, on the sixth day of creation, God created man good, without any sin at all. “Then God saw *everything* that He had made and indeed it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). God created man’s body out of the dust of the ground [*Adam* means *ground*]. “And God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul” (Gen. 2:7). “God created man in His own image... male and female” (Gen. 1:27). Mankind is as much like God as a creature can be – which makes man different from animals and angels. We were created with a *mind* to rightly know God (John 17:3), *affections* to heartily love God (1 Peter 1:8), and a *will* to praise and glorify God in “righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24) – to imitate God in all of life (Eph. 5:1), to work six days for His glory and to rest one day for His glory just like He did (Exodus 20:8-11).

Question 7: From where, then, does this depraved nature of man come? **From the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise, whereby our nature became so corrupt that we are all conceived and born in sin.**

Though God created Adam and Eve good, He created them *changeably* good, which means they could fall from goodness if they disobeyed God’s command not to eat from the forbidden tree (Gen. 2:16-17). By their fall and disobedience, they separated themselves from God, who was their true life, having corrupted their whole nature. This corruption of the whole nature [*original sin*] is a hereditary disease which extends to all mankind. We are all conceived and born in sin (Psalm 51:5; Romans 5:12).

Question 8: But are we so depraved that we are completely incapable of any good and prone to all evil? **Yes, unless we are born again by the Spirit of God.**

The corruption of our whole nature is totally depraved, completely incapable of any good in the eyes of God. “There is none who does good, no, not one” (Rom. 3:12); “every intent of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5; cf. Jeremiah 17:9; Eph. 2:1). Fallen man is still made in God’s image. A shattered mirror is still a mirror: a corrupt and distorted image is still an image. Fallen man still has a mind, affections, and a will; but his mind is darkened, his affections hate God and his neighbor, and his will is not free to obey God but is “a slave of sin” (Rom. 3:22); he can give money to the poor, but *not* of love for God (1 Cor. 13:3). Only God can cause us to be born again (regenerated), making us spiritually alive, so that our eyes are open to believe the truth, our hearts are clean to love the truth, and our wills are set free to practice the truth (Deuteronomy 30:6; Ezekiel 36:26-27).

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